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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [FR](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH CUBA POLICY: WAITING FOR A GESTURE

REF: PARIS 7145

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) In a November 15 meeting with Deputy Political Counselor and PolOff, MFA DAS-equivalent for Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean Pierre-Alain Coffinier clarified the French position on Cuba in the aftermath of FM Perez Roque's visit October 11 (reftel). Coffinier characterized the July 13 and July 22 arrests of dissidents as "incomprehensible" and a "provocation" to France, despite GoF efforts (which Coffinier conceded was a liberal interpretation of EU policy) "to engage in dialogue" with both dissidents and the GoC by holding national day events on different days. As a result, French FM Douste-Blazy had put Perez Roque on notice during their October 11 bilat that France was "waiting for a gesture" from Cuba, specifically the release of dissidents.

2. (C) Asked specifically whether Douste-Blazy's harder line with Perez Roque reflected a French policy shift, Coffinier responded that the change in the French line was one of tone or tactics rather than substance. The GoF he said, was currently taking a wait-and-see approach on Cuba, although it did not exclude the possibility of a more substantive change in the absence of action on the part of the GoC. Asked whether the GoF was thinking in terms of weeks or months, however, Coffinier declined to give a precise deadline for any such "gesture."

3. (C) Comment. Coffinier's comments confirm previous MFA indications that the French were deeply offended by the July crackdowns and have taken the GoC to task as a result. Unfortunately, French umbrage has not led to a permanent policy shift. While current French demands constitute a positive half-step, the lack of a deadline for results allows the GoC far too much leeway. Given past policy, the GoF may be satisfied by a "gesture" that falls far short of the total release of political prisoners and dissidents, particularly if it feels there is a diplomatic advantage to doing so. While this shift -- however slight -- may offer an opening for those in the EU who would prefer a tougher stance against the Castro regime, it is no doubt too early to conclude that it will deprive the Zapatero government of a strong ally in its efforts to water down the EU common foreign policy on Cuba. End Comment.

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